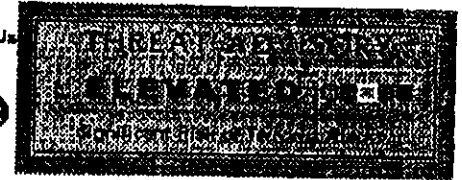




Home · Site Map · Contact Us

Search:



DHS Organization    Emergencies & Disasters    Travel & Transportation    Immigration & Borders    Research & Technology    Threats & Protection    Working with DHS    Press Room

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## Press Room

- From Secretary Ridge
- Press Releases
- Speeches & Statements
- Testimony
- Legislation
- Press Kit
- Freedom of Information Act
- Library
- En Español

## Press Room

### Speeches & Statements

### Statement for Secretary Tom Ridge U.S. Department of Homeland Security

For Immediate Release  
Office of the Press Secretary  
Contact: 202-282-8010  
July 8, 2004

**SECRETARY RIDGE:** Good morning, all. Sorry I kept you waiting. We spent a little more time with our – some of our colleagues on the Hill. We briefed the Senate this morning, went a little over, a little longer than we anticipated, but it's good to join you this morning.

You have heard me and other senior administration officials, including the National Security Advisor, the Director of the FBI, and the Attorney General discuss with the American people the increased risk of a terrorist attack this summer. And I wanted to take this opportunity to update Americans on both the status of that threat, as well as the efforts of the law enforcement and homeland security professionals across the country, under the President's leadership, to increase security.

Since September 11th, 2001, we have had intelligence that al-Qaeda intends to launch more attacks against the homeland. Credible reporting now indicates that al-Qaeda is moving forward with its plans to carry out a large-scale attack in the United States in an effort to disrupt our democratic process.

Now, based on the attack in Madrid, and we've had several conversations about that, as well as recent interdictions in England, in Jordan and Italy, we know that they have the capability to succeed, and they also hold the mistaken belief that their attacks will have an impact on America's resolve. We lack precise knowledge about time, place and method of attack, but along with the CIA, FBI and other agencies, we are actively working to gain that knowledge.

A few weeks ago, I led a classified briefing on the threat for our nation's governors in an effort to keep them apprised as we continue through this period of increased risk. Last night, I spoke with state homeland security advisors, law enforcement leaders, and first responders.

While we are not raising the color-coded threat level today, we are constantly reviewing threat reporting and strengthening the nation's security. We have permanent protections in place today that did not exist a year ago. For all intents and purposes, some didn't even



Secretary Ridge provides an update on threat and efforts to ramp up security during a press conference in Washington, D.C.

## NEWS BY DATE

- July 2004
- June 2004
- May 2004
- April 2004
- March 2004
- February 2004
- January 2004
- December 2003
- November 2003
- October 2003
- September 2003
- August 2003
- Archive



exist five or six months ago. And these protections make it harder for terrorists to attack us.

As of today, we now have a full – we now have full nationwide connectivity to the Homeland Security Operations Center, a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week nerve center for homeland security information and incident management, and all 50 states through our Homeland Security Information Network are connected to us. This is a goal we've reached five months ahead of schedule.

For the first time ever, this national operations center allows us to receive information in real time and turn that information, when appropriate, into actions that protect the homeland. It helps us to work even more closely with all of our federal partners and those at the state and local level and the private sector, sharing law enforcement and intelligence information about terrorists as never before. We've never had that capacity before.

The most advanced technologies, including the newly created, internet-based Homeland Security Information Network, allows us to maintain up-to-the-minute information, to map that information against our critical infrastructure and known threats, and then share it instantly with the White House, all 50 states, more than 50 major urban areas, and thousands of state and local agencies.

And the reverse is true as well. Information flows into the Homeland Security Operations Center from our partners throughout the country. Many of them are physically represented in the operations center itself, including seats for 35 government agencies, and local representatives, such as New York and Los Angeles police departments.

This is unprecedented communication and cooperation at the national, state and local levels. This new ability to receive and distribute critical information allows us to make better decisions more quickly and take action that would deter, detect, and defuse terrorist attacks.

For instance, we will begin a new pilot program that utilizes technology to track high-risk trucks on our nation's highways in all 50 states. And our "Operation Respond" will provide homeland security and law enforcement officials with the ability to quickly identify and track locations of rail shipments across the country.

We've also begun to deploy hundreds of handheld radiological detectors, just the size of an average pager, for use by the law enforcement officers to help, for example, in locating and preventing the use of those so-called "dirty bombs." Hundreds – literally thousands have been ordered, hundreds are in place. We intend to distribute these important resources around the country throughout the year.

And we will be monitoring, via web-enabled perimeter cameras, chemical facilities of greatest concern. The cameras will link to our Homeland Security Operations Center. They provide one piece of the real-time data that I spoke about earlier, and more are due to come on line by the end of the year.

In the coming months, the nation will host high-profile events, including those associated with our democratic traditions. We are working very closely with our colleagues, state and local officials in New York and Boston, to ensure the security of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions. I have designated these events National Special Security Events, making the United States Secret Service the lead agency for identifying and implementing protective efforts in these locations. I will soon travel to those sites myself to review the security measures being implemented.

In two weeks, we will meet with the security officials from the professional and collegiate sport associations to determine how to increase security for upcoming large sporting events as well.



We live in serious times; and this is sobering information about those who wish to do us harm. But every day, we strengthen the security of our nation, and as a nation, we are committed to the absolute protection of our citizens. Efforts each of you make to be vigilant, such as reporting suspicious items or activities to authorities, do make a difference. Every citizen, using their common sense and their eyes and ears can support our national effort to stop the terrorists.

We know, we know, that their vigilance in the long run can make a difference, and we will continue to work together to ensure that the freedom we just celebrated continues as the hallmark of this great country.

Thank you very much.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary, do you have any specific credible intelligence that terrorists are targeting either the Democratic Convention or the Republican Convention?

**Secretary Ridge:** We do not.

**Question:** Sir, once again you're saying that al-Qaeda wants to disrupt the democratic process. There are some, you know, who will interpret that as the Administration sending a subtle message that a vote for John Kerry is a vote for Osama bin Laden. How do you address those concerns, people who think that this is political?

**Secretary Ridge:** I think that, first of all, it's a wrong interpretation. We are basically laying out before the general public the kind of information that we have received and it's not us. These are not conjectures or mythical statements we are making. These are pieces of information that we could trace comfortably to sources that we deem to be credible.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary, in what way do the arrests in England, Jordan and Italy tell us – what do they tell us about – you said the capability or capacity of terrorists to carry out these attacks. What do those overseas arrests tell us about that?

**Secretary Ridge:** Well, I think – and again I will defer a more detailed explanation later on to the analysts that accompany me this morning. But what we are alluding to there is not only did they have individuals in place, but they had the means to the end that were part of the plot. They had the people ready to operate and they had the munitions and the ability to conduct the terrorist attack. That was all part of the apprehension and it is a international network.

There are cells and sources that are international and here, consistent with an effort to disrupt democracies and to further their cause against democratic countries, particularly, we have apprehended individuals who had the means to operate.

**Question:** And can you give us some indication of how, since the last big serious concern around the holidays, what is the – compared to that, what is the volume of the kind of information that you're following here? Is it at those kinds of levels?

**Secretary Ridge:** I will let the analysts comment more specifically. The only thing I can say to you is that we are very comfortable with the credibility of the sources themselves. Obviously, how credible some of the information is something that we continue to try to corroborate. But in terms of the sources we have, they are deemed by everyone involved as credible.

Sir.

**Question:** Secretary Ridge, one question I have deals with timing. There has been a



steady stream of this kind of information coming in since, roughly, March, or so. Why now? Why give all of these briefings at this particular point?

**Secretary Ridge:** Why? I'm sorry, I didn't --

**Question:** Why give all of these briefings at this particular point and time?

**Secretary Ridge:** Well, actually, we started this process several months ago, and I think there was a -- I gave a speech to the National Association of Broadcasters some time ago. I thought that in the post-Madrid environment, it would be very important on a periodic basis to, frankly, just give Americans an update as to where we are and what we are doing, and you can fully anticipate that in the weeks and months ahead, we will ask you to convene again for another update.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary, are you concerned that the public is going to become complacent? Is that why we keep hearing the same message?

**Secretary Ridge:** No, I -- one of the advantages I have as Secretary of this Department is the opportunity to travel around the country and to talk to the security and law enforcement professionals, as well as individual citizens. And I can say without a doubt that the level of security is higher and the level of vigilance, really, in my mind, has never abated.

And, frankly, whenever I have an opportunity to speak publicly to you, but as well to America, remind them as part of our national effort, individual citizens, using their common sense and their eyes and ears, can help us stop terrorists. I'm absolutely convinced that one of these days that we're going to be able to trace either a report or actual -- or interdiction to a citizen or a local law enforcement officer.

Yes.

**Question:** With Senators Kerry and Edwards living so close to each other in Georgetown, are there any plans to make any extraordinary security measures down there, closing streets, et cetera?

**Secretary Ridge:** Well, as you know, under the law, both the men and their families are entitled to Secret Service protection. As a matter of fact, the day that Senator Kerry announced that his running mate would be Senator Edwards, we received a formal communication requesting that support, and the same day, within hours, we communicated back, "We'll have the Secret Service knocking on your door to set up the arrangements to give you additional security." And we'll leave those kinds of decisions to be discussed with both the candidates, but not to be revealed publicly.

Yes.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary, a prominent member of the Election Assistance Commission has expressed his concern that with all the flurry of information about the election, Homeland Security has made no provision about rescheduling or possibly what to do with the elections in the event of a terrorist attack.

**Secretary Ridge:** Well, I read the letter. I don't exactly agree with its conclusion. But there are constitutional and security questions that are certainly involved and we're working on them, and certainly he will be involved, that individual and that group will be involved in the process.

Yes.



**Question:** Sir, Mr. Secretary, you mentioned the Homeland Security Information Network, also known as JRIES — it now operates at the sensitive but unclassified level — as being expanded to the Secret level.

**Secretary Ridge:** By the end of the year we'll have the firewalls in place to get that done.

**Question:** Meanwhile, the TTIC Online system, which operates at the Top Secret level, is being expanded downward to the Secret level for an additional capability. Doesn't this mean there are two stovepipe systems in this arena of information sharing, so we're looking back at the same problem we have seen for many years?

**Secretary Ridge:** Well, I'm going to let the senior intelligence officials take over now, and respond to that when I've concluded. But the Department of Homeland Security, both as a department but the professionals involved, including our intelligence officials, have as good a day-to-day working relationship as any other members of the intelligence-gathering community.

And to the extent that we have and will continue to collaborate and make sure that the messages that we send out to law enforcement or citizens or the private sector are consistent with our analysis, it's what we've done in the past and what we plan on doing in the future. We work very closely with them and the statements that we communicate to our partners at the state and local level and within the private sector is always coordinated with them.

**Question:** Sir, can I ask you a question about the conventions?

**Secretary Ridge:** Yes.

**Question:** Both Boston and New York seem to have a lot of concern about subway or rail bombings —

**Secretary Ridge:** Yes.

**Question:** — particularly in light of Moscow and Madrid, and they're taking a lot of precautions. Is there anything that indicates that there's a particular concern on your part about rail as opposed to any other means?

**Secretary Ridge:** Well, I think the concern, both at the local level at the convention sites but actually at the national level within our department, is based upon precisely the kind of targets that they have been in the past. Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations have targeted mass transit. Remember the sarin gas incident in Japan as well. You alluded to the incident in Russia, the Spanish incident.

And as part of the overall comprehensive security plan, the Secret Service is working with those mass transit agencies. But I should tell you that as part of our overall national plan, we're not just working with the mass transit authorities in the convention cities, we're working with mass transit authorities in every community that has one.

But clearly, given the particular venues that have been selected and the proximity to railroad and mass transit, that is of a concern but we feel we can adequately address it. And one of the reasons we've been able to draw that conclusion is because of the extraordinary cooperation with state and local law enforcement.

**Question:** At this point, what would it take to raise the alert to Orange? And have you heard from any state — state or local leaders that are telling you we just can't afford it?

**Secretary Ridge:** Well, we wouldn't necessarily broadcast to the terrorists what it would



take for us to raise it to Orange, but we know internally that there are a couple of tripwires that might cause us to pull everybody together to begin that whole process. We share with you a — I've said this on many other occasions. We churn information daily. We begin discussing that information in the White House, and then twice a day the intelligence community, by secure video, goes over not only the threat information of the day but the threat information that's been accumulated over a period of time. And I think we all know internally the kind of environment which includes perhaps the nature of reporting or the amount of reporting, but we have in our own minds what the tripwires might be for us to begin that process.

But again, we have more protective measures in place at Yellow today than we did six months or a year ago, and there will be more put in place on a day-to-day basis every single day for as long as the Department exists, which means hopefully we get smarter and better about integrating people and technology all around the country. But be assured that on a daily basis, several times a day, we take a look at what we've received and what we have gained to make a determination as to whether we ought to raise it. And you should know that — and I mentioned in our remarks — the CIA and the FBI and Homeland Security have put together the multiple task forces that are trying to secure more additional information about this threat reporting stream.

Thank you very much.

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